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ABSTRACT

This book focuses primarily on the relationship between the dominant societal form of organization, bureaucracy, and what counts as childhood, particularly the two years before compulsory education and the educational institution that leads up to it, the nursery school. How the bureaucratic form of contemporary society affects nursery school education is central to this study, which employs a sociological approach and draws upon the historical sociology of Norbert Elias and the methodology of non-participant observation. The book begins with a historical overview, analyzing the evolution of the cultural definition of childhood since the Middle Ages. Along with the historical analysis is a discussion of three nursery schools. The empirical part of the study filters the events within the nurseries through the concept of bureaucracy, specifically considering how time, space, and activities are structured within each nursery, noting the variations between them, and attempting to explain those variations sociologically. Consideration is given to how nurseries reconcile the contradiction of retaining the innocence and freedom of the individual child in an age that bears witness to an ever-expanding institutionalization and standardization of society. An examination of nursery staff views and practices is followed by a look at the future of early education. References are included with each chapter. (TJQ)

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